

# 5.6.07

The Way We Live Now

## Reinventing Middle Age

How old are you anyway?

By Daphne Merkin

**Quick, what does the following list** suggest to you: Lamaze classes; baby showers; "parenting skills"; preschool anxiety all the way up to college; transitional phases; timeouts; chronic credit-card debt; the indiscriminate wearing of athletic garb; political correctness; anti-political correctness; midlife crises; couples therapy; divorce mediation; Botox; dermatological fillers; cosmetic surgery; the new-and-improved menopause; wearing sunglasses in winter even though you're not famous; comb-overs; an obsession with the daily lives of the celebrated and merely notorious; real estate as a means to an end; a debilitating reliance on takeout dinners; a preference for esoteric coffee beans; an aversion to butter; an uneasy feeling of identification with Bob Dylan; a denial of death; cilantro, cilantro, cilantro; framing every photograph you've ever taken; the belief that your dog/cat is you; an excessively personalized vision of retirement; older single mothers; grandfatherly second-time fathers; a fear that you've become your mother or father; a free-floating feeling of grievance that you've failed to make obscene amounts of money as a hedge-fund manager; a gut instinct that immortality might be just around the next technological bend. If you still haven't figured out that I'm talking about the so-called baby-boomer generation, you might consider the possibility that the reason you are having difficulty making out the fine print of any given subtext is because you need reading glasses.

Once upon a complacent time we may have thought that we were, to quote John Lennon, clever and classless and free. Nowadays, I wager that many of us have come to realize that we are stuck in the muck and mire of habit and convention. We have become chips off the old block, carrying around our parents' voices in our heads even as we swat away their child-rearing beliefs, conservative spending habits and stoic acceptance of mortality. Behind all this busy reinvention of the wheel of life, of course, sheer dread lies in wait: the fear that we're fast gaining upon that demarcation line where you stop being young and you start being something else entirely, someone belonging to a different order of nomenclature. (It might well be that the *Sturm und Drang* of middle age comes down to nothing more significant than a problem of taxonomy.) Heck, if we knew we were going to grow older this quickly, we would have

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Photograph by Bill Jacobson

### BABY-BOOMER POPULATION

The latest data from 2005. Since then, the first baby boomers, born in 1946 and 1947, have turned 60.



Source: U.S. Census  
Chart by Catalogtree